

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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"THE FLOWER OF DOOM;"

OR, THE CONSPIRATOR.

A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

By MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS,

Author of "Kitty," "Love and Mirage," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VII. THE FLOWER OF DESTINY, AND A DISCOURSE UPON A PASTY.

How was the tenor of Bernarda's daily existence changed by those Sunday visits! Edgeworth came regularly, and, although their talk was for the most part of a harmless personal kind, the door would be occasionally thrown wide upon a black, unconscionable world. Bernarda realised that the even, guileless life with flowers was over; vanished the eager quest in flowery dingles and sun-bright fields; gone, never to return, the rapturous hours amid tropic splendours; and, ere long, would be ended, too, the days sweetened and subdued by congenial toil, the companionship of her innocent, sportive, flower-wearing girls, and the task of beautifying thousands of unknown dwellings with imperishable flowers. It seemed to Bernarda that in parting with this familiar calling, she was bidding farewell, not only to her best friend, but to a kind of talisman. The necessity of earning daily bread, and the privilege of earning it in a manner positively fascinating to one of her especial turn of mind, had, perhaps, staved off mental shipwreck. She had said this to herself again and again as she recalled the past, and lived over again the shock that Edgeworth's conduct had given her moral nature. Desertion, she would not call it. He had given her up in a moment of desperate fortunes. To have kept to his word would have seemed doing her wrong. The pansy she wore recalled that later and far less pardonable dereliction, the

unbroken silence of ten long years. Her betrothal-flower worn so constantly symbolised many things; but above all, the injustice at the root of such unfaithfulness. She wore it as a reminder to be just to a hair's breadth in her dealings with others, especially where their affections were concerned. She would never, for instance, encourage the sentimental clinging of any of her girls, or seem to care for them in the least degree more than was really the case. She was ever on her guard against receiving or according hasty affection.

In a certain fanciful sense she regarded her pansy as a flower of destiny, and not even Edgeworth's raileries about the death's-head could now make her exchange it for any other. Why should she forget the sweetest, sternest lesson of her life?

In her wild girlish days she had passionately loved the man whom she was now going to marry without any love on her side or his own. But the secret she had ever kept, and even Edgeworth would never know it now. A vindictive or less generous woman would have regarded such a position very differently. Bernarda put personal motives aside, and only welcomed her lover's tardy reparation as a chance of moral rescue for himself. Her love for him was dead. For all that, she might win him back, and stop him mid-way in his career.

As yet her conduct was undefined, and the future lay veiled in uncertainty. But one thing was clear. If these frequent visits of Edgeworth's changed the tenor of Bernarda's life, they were certainly not without influence on his own. The oftener he came, the oftener he wanted to come. The more he confided in her, the more, it seemed, he must confide. In spite, moreover, of an evident desire to be circumspect, he would sometimes manifest

the incaution that seems part of a conspirator's character. A thousand circumstances, mere trifles in themselves, showed Bernarda whither she was drifting. The pleasant sense of freedom and safety born of obscurity could be hers no longer. Already she had linked her fate with Edgeworth's. To herself she belonged not now.

Winter set in early that year, November snows covering October roses, but the more inclement and boisterous the weather, the more alertly he came.

Bernarda's pretty room, with its close-drawn curtains and blazing logs, seemed to exercise a kind of glamour over him. The long, if not confidential, yet unconstrained talks; the solicitude, and, in a certain sense, protectiveness found by a man at a woman's fireside; the feeling of fellowship evoked by the fragrant tea, sipped from her shamrock cups—these things soon became matters of habit, all the more agreeable because they came as a relief to the life he led outside Bernarda's doors. Their relations remained apparently the same, not a trace of awakening passion on his side or of revived affection on hers. But without being young and romantic, an affianced bride and bridegroom may find much to say to each other. She could show that concern for his health becoming a woman about to exchange the name of friend for that of wife. He would find himself criticising her dress or consulting her taste as to the matter of a new fur-bordered coat.

One evening, after a longer and livelier visit than usual, he begged Bernarda's permission to remain to supper.

"Anyhow, do not drive me out for another hour," he said, drawing aside the curtain an inch, and pointing to the snow-flakes that fell thick and fast. "I know what your modest little seven o'clock suppers are, my dear; I have encountered the singing-girl with her tray before now. Well, share your glass of milk and sandwich with me for once—just once! Then I shall have nothing to do but to find my way home, and go to bed."

Bernarda let him have his way. Certainly, she reasoned with herself, her company was the best, or at least the safest for him just now. His very gaiety and high spirits frightened her. She felt sure that he was standing on the edge of a precipice; was, perhaps, lending himself to some plot more dreadful than any with which such conspiracies had as yet terrified the world.

But she could not, dared not question him, or even lead him into confidences. Her little piano stood open, and, uninvited, she sat down to play and sing to him. It was impossible that there should be any longer a vestige of ceremoniousness between two friends about to seal their friendship by marriage in a few weeks. Bernarda, moreover, was deliberately laying herself out to please. No woman could be less of a coquette than she. But without trying to captivate his fancy she might regain her empire over his affections, and every hour of easy, fireside intercourse made the task easier.

"Ah, a song or two before we sup and say good-night," he said, with a smile of satisfaction; "a song of our youth—a song of our country—eh, Erna?"

She began a pathetic little ballad, and lazily from his armchair he joined in the refrain. The very freedom of this intercourse constituted its chief charm in his mind. Had he felt compelled to stand by the piano, deferentially turning over the leaves, even Bernarda's music would have been no longer a refreshment.

So effortless, almost mechanical, sounded that rich, sweet voice of his on Bernarda's ears that she hardly felt sure if he were listening at all.

He seemed to be almost unconsciously repeating words and melody familiar to him from childhood.

Nor did she ever choose her songs with any set purpose. She would not point a moral at him in this way. The moral must come of itself, just as some especial butterfly, cloud, or field-flower strikes the careless eye, and preaches to the unexpectant mind. Thus an hour passed, and the singing-girl appeared with the supper-tray. But Bernarda had given a stealthy order, and the meal was suited to the appetite of a hungry man. There was a bottle of good claret. There was a meat pasty hot, from an Italian oven close by; something to fall back upon in the shape of that dainty of all dainties, a Suffolk ham sweetened by old harvest-beer; and lastly, for grace, rather than gross appetite, the lighter cates that women love—a cake, a pear, and a little lump of vermilion-coloured jelly, clear as a sea-anemone.

"On my word," he said, "you feast me as if I were a prince! Although why princes should ever be feasted I cannot conceive, seeing that they are so surfeited with good things, prison-fare is the only change one could think of as affording a

possible treat to them. Was ever a woman like you? Nothing whatever seems a trouble!"

"You must have consorted with dolts and brainless idiots all these years," Bernarda replied, quietly satiric. "Is it such a stroke of genius to send for a pasty when your next door neighbour happens to be a confectioner?"

"The matter is much more complicated than you think," he said, as he ate with admirable relish, soon uninvited replenishing her plate and his own. "In the first place, there is to think of the pasty; in the second, to have tested the excellency of the pasty beforehand; in the third, to be perfectly sure that the said pasty will come steaming hot to table; in the fourth, to be equally certain that your guest's especial digestion is adapted to a ticklish thing like a pasty; in the fifth, to exercise mathematical reasoning concerning the pasty—if too small, your visitor is afraid to eat his fill, if too large, appetite is surfeited in advance—sixthly—"

"My dear Edgeworth," Bernarda broke in merrily, laying a long, slender, beautiful hand on his arm, "in Heaven's name finish your tirade! There is the ham to moralise upon, and when was ever all said that can possibly be said about so suggestive a thing as a ham?"

"You don't suppose I am going to take the ham in hand to-day?" he said, becoming sportive as herself. "My dear girl, I forbid you to touch it either; you shall see me do justice to the ham, both as a caterer and a rhetorician, to-morrow, and how many to-morrows! You will never finish it without me. That is quite certain!"

CHAPTER VIII. THE VOICE FATIOQUENT.

THAT genial, almost happy evening ended early. Ten had not yet chimed from the thousand City churches when the lights were put out in Bernarda's house, and she was making ready for rest with a smile on her lips. Edgeworth's wit and high spirits were irresistible, and his kind, almost affectionate leave-taking touched her. He was over-grateful for such little services, she thought; a song, a glowing hearth, a meal—these were all she had given him, yet he had lingered on the threshold to thank her again and again.

Since their first interview he had never kissed her. She shrank from anything like a lover-like demonstration, and he saw it. Why should there be any semblance

between them of a feeling that did not exist, her face said always? So they invariably met and parted after the manner of mere friends, although every hour of intercourse brought them nearer together.

The smile lingered on Bernarda's face to-night, as, wrapped in a fleecy white dressing-gown, and leaning back in a fauteuil, she abandoned herself to the pleasant task of combing her long black hair. For a moment she allowed her mind to indulge in a strange, a comfortable delusion. This Edgeworth could never become a man of crime and villainy after all. From under the upas-tree of evil he would, slowly, perchance, but surely pass. Not love, but something purer, more lasting, better, would step by step entice him into ways of righteousness and peace. By friendship should the man she had once adored be rescued from perdition now.

On a sudden she was aroused from these pleasant dreams by a painful apparition—reality it hardly seemed to her in that first moment of shocked surprise.

There stood her bright, sportive Marion, a girl almost Undine-like in her incapacity to grasp the serious side of things—there stood the ever-radiant, ever-singing Marion, white and trembling, a prey to abject terror.

"Mistress!" cried the girl, coming to Bernarda's side and hiding her face in the folds of her white dressing-gown—"mistress, I dare not sleep alone to-night. We are watched. The wicked have designs against us."

"Foolish child!" Bernarda said as she gently shook off the timid, clinging thing, and rose with a look of determination; "sleep alone you shall not if you dread trolls and wraiths. There is my sofa for you. But come, show me where lurk these would-be thieves and assassins of two harmless women, for there is no money or other treasure in the house, my Marion. You must be dreaming."

"You will find no one," said the girl, putting back her curls with a childish effort to be self-controlled; "it is the mystery that frightens me. These dark, peering faces come and go like shadows. The stealthy footsteps are here one moment, gone the next. And at night I hear voices, horrid whispers close by, yet never a creature is to be seen."

Light was breaking on Bernarda's mind now, but for a moment she clutched at another interpretation. She scrutinised her little maiden as a physician inspects a patient.

"You are ailing, perhaps? I must send you home for a change."

"No; I am as well as can be. I do not wish to leave you," the girl said, fondly taking one of her mistress's white hands, and stroking her own cheek with it.

"Then," Bernarda answered, smiling down indulgently on the pale, pretty, weeping child, "then we must have the lame sister to keep you company till you get rid of these foolish fancies. And now I will go and look round the house, then to bed."

"Mistress," Marion burst out at last, unable any longer to keep back her dreadful revelation, forced by pure terror into confronting Bernarda's displeasure, "I must speak out. The house has been watched from the first day Mr. Edgeworth set foot in it."

Bernarda turned pale then as her little serving-maid. There had spoken no child's fantasy, but a voice fatiloquent, a voice of doom! She controlled herself, however; not for worlds should anyone, much less a sixteen-year-old girl, know what was passing in her mind, or have any share in her affairs. Very kindly she put Marion away, and reiterated her commands.

"To bed—to bed; away with such fancies!" she cried. "To-night on my sofa, and to-morrow the lame sister comes to keep her foolish Marion company."

It was characteristic of both mistress and maid that Bernarda felt under no necessity to hold up a warning finger and whisper the word "Beware!" in Marion's ear now. Even in a crisis like this she could entirely trust the girl's sense of honour. Not even the lame sister would know of the connexion in Marion's mind between Edgeworth's visits and the mysterious signs, should they be repeated. Bernarda's affairs were sacred. Alone she now set out on the nightly round of inspection, hitherto carelessly made. It behoved her, as mistress of the house, to see that keys were turned, shutters closed, and bars drawn, but the fear of marauders had never so much as crossed her mind. There was no gold in the house, nor treasure either, and what else should such gentry seek? Nor had it occurred to her that Edgeworth's visits might prove a source of danger to herself. But was it so?

An unexpected conviction now flashed across her mind. Towards Edgeworth the portent was surely directed.

Over his head was hung the sword of Damocles. The embroidery mistress and her singing-girl were as safe as if the conspirator had never crossed their path; but the ministers of the law were keeping closest watch over him. Perhaps already he had forfeited the citizen's right to be at large. Any day, any hour, he might find himself within prison walls; duress, suffering, and ignominy his portion for the remainder of his days.

To what horrid deed might he not have given his adherence? To what death-warrant universal set his sign manual?

He should be forthwith warned of his peril, and then it would rest with him to contrive his own safety. She determined to think no more that night, but see to her bolts and bars, and then go to sleep as if nothing had happened.

To Bernarda, as to many other women in the flower of life and gifted with a splendid physique, bodily fear was unknown. She was quite ready to encounter midnight prowlers, should any lurk within her precincts.

The day had been one of snow-storm, with driving gusts, but the night was starlit and calm. Bernarda, with a fur cloak thrown over her, proceeded to inspect the house from top to bottom. It was no showy semi-detached villa, run up within recent years by contract, but a solid piece of red-brick masonry, perhaps two hundred years old. There are few such houses nowadays, and every one, as it falls to the hammer, is snapped up by an artist. From an artist, indeed, Bernarda leased the house, turning the studio to good account as a work-room, and utilising other nooks and corners not found in brand new constructions. There was a small garden at the back; and who can keep thieves or spies out of a house with a garden, or, indeed, any house at all? mused Bernarda, smiling ruefully. The only way to be free from anxiety on this score is to have nothing worth stealing or watching. She gave up the task as hopeless, and went back to her warm chamber. The gas was turned down and the fire burned low, but Marion's golden hair seemed to light up the place. She wore one of those simple, childish night-gowns, gathered round the throat by a white ribbon, and over the plain folds fell her short, bright curls, as a seraph's in an old picture. The hair was not encumberingly long, no mere silken yellow veil, rather a little rippling cloud of shifting gold, and no picture could be

fairer than the purely-outlined face thus encircled. A tear still lingered on the rosy cheek, but there was no other sign of dismay. Marion slumbered as if she had been carolling all day long. Strange that Bernarda should never have noticed such sudden dumbness of her singing-bird! The child's sweet, hitherto irrepressible contralto had stopped on a sudden, leaving her part of the house mute as an uninhabited place, and Bernarda had taken no heed. As she now, however, bent over the guileless sleeper, tears of shame, anguish, and remorse rose to her eyes. Not that she especially cared for her blonde, trilling, caressing Marion; she knew that the girl would attach herself as fondly to any other employer in a week. A feeling, deeper, intenser far than mere liking, caused those rare tears to flow. It was her passionate sense of justice which had been here outraged. In Marion she already saw a victim of that unholy league of which Edgeworth boasted himself the moving spirit. By what right had he and his associates thus to rob such innocent lives of peace and trustingness? For the young are very impressionable, and Marion might be far more terrified than she had ventured to avow. Perhaps years would elapse ere her mind recovered its balance, and a girl once as fearless as any girl in London would venture to sit alone on a winter evening.

Marion should be sent away next day, Bernarda said. If Edgeworth's presence brought peril with it, then the hazard should be her own only. Again and again, and even with more distinctness, now that warning voice reached her from afar, she was beginning to realise, although, as yet, but in a dim and undefined way, that she and peace of mind had parted company. Waking or sleeping, busy or idle, there was no more security for her, no sweet inner sense of safety and repose. It was not very likely that she could do Edgeworth much good. He had sought her out too late, as far as his own redemption was concerned. But if she could not bend the course of his existence, how was he already shaping hers? She shuddered as she looked into the future, or even glanced so far ahead as the morrow. To what dark fate had she surrendered herself in promising to marry this man? Already that flower of hers, worn as a token of lost love, seemed no longer a flower of destiny, but of doom. The death's-head which Edgeworth's fancy had discerned on its petals

recurred to her. Was not the flower symbolic, fit love-token for such hands to gather? But no guilt had stained them when years ago he plucked a pansy for his love, and, if she kept painful vigils now, it was not for the grief he had caused her or the dangers that beset her own path, but for the degradation of that generous nature, the perversion of that once candid soul.

THE METHODS OF AUTHORS.

THE method by which a man works is always interesting as an indication of character. So thinks the biographer of Buckle, whose method was chiefly remarkable for careful, systematic industry and punctilious accuracy. His memory appeared to be almost faultless, yet he took as much precaution against failure as if he dared not trust it. He invariably read with "paper and pencil in his hand, making copious references for future consideration. How laboriously this system was acted upon can be appreciated only by those who have seen his note-books, in which the passages so marked during his reading were either copied or referred to under proper heads. Volume after volume was thus filled, written with the same precise neatness that characterises his MS. for the press, and indexed with care so that immediate reference might be made to any topic. But careful as these extracts and references were made, there was not a quotation in one of the copious notes that accompanied his work that was not verified by collation with the original from which it was taken."

Trollope's system is well known, but we may quote a curious explanation of his fertility.

"When I have commenced a new book I have always prepared a diary, divided into weeks, and carried it on for the period which I have allowed myself for the completion of the work. In this I have entered day by day the number of pages I have written, so that if at any time I have slipped into idleness for a day or two, the record of that idleness has been there staring me in the face, and demanding of me increased labour, so that the deficiency might be supplied. According to the circumstances of the time—whether my other business might be then heavy or light, or whether the book which I was writing was or was not wanted with speed—I have

allotted myself so many pages a week. The average number has been about forty. It has been placed as low as twenty, and has risen to one hundred and twelve. And as a page is an ambiguous term, my page has been made to contain two hundred and fifty words; and, as words, if not watched, will have a tendency to straggle, I have had every word counted as I went."

Much has been said about the quality of Mr. Trollope's work. There seems a consensus of opinion that it had degenerated. "Mr. Trollope," says Mr. Freeman, "had certainly gone far to write himself out. His later work is far from being so good as his earlier. But, after all, his worst work is better than a great many other people's best; and, considering the way in which it was done, it is wonderful that it was done at all. I, myself, know what fixed hours of work are, and their value; but I could not undertake to write about William Rufus or Appius Claudius up to a certain moment on the clock, and to stop at that moment. I suppose it was from his habits of official business that Mr. Trollope learned to do it, and every man undoubtedly knows best how to do his own work. Still it is strange that works of imagination did not suffer by such a way of doing." Mr. James Payn says that Trollope has injured his reputation by publishing his methods of writing, and the *Daily News*, in referring to Alphonse Daudet's history of his own novels, doubts whether he has acted wisely. As the editor says, "An effect of almost too elaborate art—a feeling that we are looking at a mosaic painfully made up of little pieces picked out of real life and fitted together, has often been present to the consciousness of M. Daudet's readers. That feeling is justified by his description of his creative efforts."

M. Daudet's earlier works were light and humorous, like *Tartarin*, or they were idyllic, and full of Provençal scenery, the nature and the nightingales of M. Daudet's birthplace, the South. One night at the theatre, when watching the splendid failure of an idyllic Provençal sort of play, M. Daudet made up his mind that he must give the public sterner stuff, and describe the familiar Parisian scenery of streets and quais. His wise determination was the origin of his novels, *Jack*, *Froment Jeune et Rissler Ainé*, and the rest. Up to that time, M. Daudet, with M. Zola, M. Flaubert, and the brothers Goncourt, had all been more or less unpopular authors. It is not long ago since they had

a little club of the unsuccessful, and M. Daudet was the first of the company who began to blossom out into numerous editions. M. Daudet's secret as a novelist, as far as the secret is communicable, seems to be his wonderfully close study of actual life, and his unscrupulousness in reproducing its details almost without disguise. He frankly confesses that not only the characters in his political novels, but in his other works, are drawn straight from living persons.

The scenery is all sketched from nature, M. Daudet describing the vast factories with which he was familiar when, at the age of sixteen, he began to earn his own living, or the interiors to which he was admitted by virtue of his position under a great man of the late Imperial administration. Places about which he did not know much and which needed to be introduced into his tales, M. Daudet visited with his note-book. M. Daudet's mode of work is, first, to see his plot and main incidents clearly; to arrive at a full understanding of his characters, then to map out his chapters, and then, he says, his fingers tingle to be at work. He writes rapidly, handing each wet slip of paper to Madame Daudet for criticism and approval. There is no such sound criticism, he says, as this helpful collaborator, who withal is "so little a woman of letters." When a number of chapters are finished, M. Daudet finds it well to begin publishing his novel in a journal. Thus he is obliged to finish within a certain date; he cannot go back to make alterations; he cannot afford time to write a page a dozen times over, as a conscientious artist often wishes to do.

The Quaker poet, Whittier, considers himself unlike other authors, for he says he never had any method. "When I felt like it," he says, "I wrote, and I neither had the health nor the patience to work over it afterwards. It usually went as it was originally completed." Charles Dickens had the faculty of making his fictitious characters real to himself. Charlotte Brontë was equally interested in the characters she drew. Whilst writing *Jane Eyre*, she became intensely concerned in the fortunes of her heroine, whose smallness and plainness corresponded with her own. When she had brought the little Jane to *Thornfield*, her enthusiasm had grown so great that she could not stop. She went on writing incessantly for weeks. At the end of this time she had made the minute woman conquer temptation, and in the

dawn of the summer morning leave Thornfield "After Jane left Thornfield, the rest of the book," says Miss Martineau, "was written with less vehemence and with more anxious care—the world adds, with less vigour and interest." Wilkie Collins's book, *Heart and Science*, so mercifully excited him that he says he continued writing week after week without a day's interval or rest. "Rest was impossible. I made a desperate effort; rushed to the sea; went sailing and fishing; and was writing my book all the time 'in my head' as the children say. The one wise course to take was to go back to my desk and empty my head, and then rest. My nerves are too much shaken for travelling. An armchair and a cigar, and a hundred and fiftieth reading of the glorious Walter Scott—King, Emperor, and President of Novelists—there is the regimen that is doing me good. All the other novel-writers I can read while I am at work myself. If I only look at the *Antiquary*, or *Old Mortality*, I am crushed by the sense of my own littleness, and there is no work possible for me on that day."

Literary partnerships are common in France, but in England they are confined almost exclusively to dramatists. The one well-known exception was that of Messrs. Besant and Rice. Mr. Rice's partnership with Mr. Besant commenced in 1871, and ended with the death of Mr. Rice. "It arose," explains Mr. Besant, "out of some slight articles which I contributed to his magazine, and began with the novel called *Ready-Money Mortiboy*. Of this eleven years' fellowship and intimate, almost daily intercourse, I can only say that it was carried on throughout without a single shadow of dispute or difference. James Rice was eminently a large-minded man, and things which might have proved great rocks of offence to some, he knew how to treat as the trifles they generally are."

In France, the best example of literary partnership is found in that of M. Erckmann and M. Chatrian. How these men work in concert has been described by the author of *Men of the Third Republic*.

"M. Chatrian is credited with being the more imaginative of the two. The first outlines of the plots are generally his, as also the love-scenes, and all the descriptions of Phalsbourg and the country around. M. Erckmann puts in the political reflections, furnishes the soldier-types, and elaborates those plain speeches which fit so quaintly, but well, into the mouths of

his honest peasants, sergeants, watch-makers, and schoolmasters. A clever critic remarked that Erckmann-Chatrian's characters are always hungry and eating. The blame, if any, must lie on M. Chatrian's shoulders, to whose fancy belong the steaming tureens of soup, the dishes of browned sausages and sauer-kraut, the mounds of flowery potatoes bursting plethorically through their skins. All that M. Erckmann adds to the menu is the black coffee, of which he insists, with some energy, on being a connoisseur. Habitually the co-authors meet to sketch out their plots, and talk them over amid much tobacco-smoking. Then, when the story has taken clear shape in their minds, one or other of the pair writes the first chapter, leaving blanks for the dialogues or descriptions which are best suited to the competency of the other. Every chapter thus passes through both writers' hands, is revised, re-copied, and, as occasion requires, either shortened or lengthened in the process. When the whole book is written, both authors revise it again, and always with a view to curtailment. Novelists who dash off six volumes of diluted fiction in a year, and affect to think naught of the feat, would grow pensive at seeing the labour bestowed by MM. Erckmann and Chatrian on the least of their works, as well as their patient research in assuring themselves that their historical episodes are correct, and their descriptions of existing localities true to nature. But this careful industry will have its reward, for the novels of MM. Erckmann and Chatrian will live. The signs of vitality were discovered in them as soon as the two authors, nerved by their first success, settled down and produced one tale after another, all too slowly for the public demand. *The Story of a Conscript*, *Waterloo*, *The History of a Man of the People*, and above all, *The History of a Peasant*, were read with wonder as well as interest."

As an illustration of the care taken by some authors over their works, we may quote an anecdote relating to the late G. P. R. James, whose novels at one time had a very large circulation. "I found him," one of his friends says, "dolefully seated over a manuscript. He was not writing, but he was gazing at it in melancholy despair. I thought he was ill, and asked him whether this was the case. 'No,' he replied; he was physically well. What, then, was the

matter with him? I anxiously enquired. 'It's my heroine,' he replied; 'I've got her in such a fix that I cannot extricate her without a slight violation of the rules of propriety.' 'Then let her be improper, and don't let us be late for the train,' I flippantly said. 'My dear friend,' he replied, 'do you want to ruin me? Are you not aware that I live by never allowing my heroines to do anything to which the most stringent mamma might object? If once the slightest doubt were raised about my novels being sound reading for the most innocent of schoolroom girls, my occupation would be gone.' And so we missed the train; but the heroine emerged from the pages of the novel a model of all the heroine ought to be under difficult circumstances."

Much might be said of the feelings of readers in reference to the fate of the characters drawn by the novelist. "Mrs. Burnett, how could you kill Tredennis?" asked a reader of *Through One Administration*. "Why, I wrote two conclusions," was the answer. "First I killed both, but that would not do, and there was nothing for it but to kill the soldier. It broke my heart, for I loved that man, but he had to die!" On the other hand, the Mrs. Proudie of Anthony Trollope became such a bore that he determined to get rid of her by killing her.

The difference in the methods adopted by different authors is as great as the difference in their choice of subjects. There is a story quoted in illustration of the different characteristics of three great nationalities which equally illustrates the different paths which may be followed in any intellectual enterprise.

An Englishman, a Frenchman, and a German, competing for a prize offered for the best essay on the natural history of the camel, adopted each his own method of research upon the subject. The German, laying in a stock of tobacco, retired to his study in order to evolve from the depths of his philosophic consciousness the primitive notion of a camel. The Frenchman resorted to the nearest library, and ransacked its contents with a view to collect all that other men had said upon the subject. The Englishman packed his carpet-bag and set sail for the East, that he might study the habits of the animal in its original haunts. The blending of these three methods is the perfection of study; but the Frenchman's method is not unknown even among Englishmen. Nor is it to be absolutely

condemned. The man who reads a hundred books on a subject, in order to write one, confers a real benefit upon society, provided he does his work well. But some very capital work has been written without the necessity either of research or of original investigation. Trollope drew his famous Archdeacon without ever having met a live Archdeacon. He never lived in any cathedral city except London; Archdeacon Grantly was the child of "moral consciousness" alone; he knew nothing, except indirectly, about Bishops and Deans. In fact, *The Warden* was conceived not primarily as a clerical novel, but as a novel which should work out a dramatic situation—that of an honest, amiable man who was the holder, by no fault of his own, of an endowment which was in itself an abuse, and on whose devoted head should fall the thunders of those who attacked the abuse.

Bryan Waller Procter had never seen the ocean when he wrote *The Sea*; neither Schiller nor Rossini had seen Switzerland when they wrote their *William Tells*. George Cruikshank's sketches of the Boulevards and the Palais Royal, elaborated from sketches furnished to him, were wonderfully spirited and true, although he had never been across the Channel. Indeed, he never got beyond a French seaport in the course of his long life. A day at Boulogne comprehended all his Continental experiences.

Harrison Ainsworth, the Lancashire novelist, when he wrote *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard*, relied absolutely on his power of reading up and assimilation, and never had the slightest intercourse with thieves in his life. It is said that when he wrote the really admirable ride of Turpin to York, he only went at a great pace over the paper with a road-map and description of the country in front of him. It was only when he heard everybody say how truly the country was described, and how faithfully he had observed distances and localities, that he actually drove over the ground for the first time, and declared that it was more like his account than he could have imagined.

"A man would do well to carry a pencil in his pocket, and write down the thoughts of the moment. Those that come unsought for are generally the most valuable, and should be secured, because they seldom return." This was the advice of Lord Bacon, whose example has been followed by many eminent men. For instance, it is said of Hobbes that, when he composed

his Leviathan, he walked much, and mused as he walked, and that he had in the head of his cane a pen and inkhorn, and a note-book in his pocket. As soon as a thought darted into his mind, he entered it in his book. Miss Martineau has recorded that Barry Cornwall's favourite method of composition was indulged when alone in a crowd, and best in the streets of London. He had also a habit of running into a shop to write down his verses. Tom Moore's custom was to compose as he walked. He had a table in his garden, on which he wrote down his thoughts. When the weather was bad, he paced up and down his small study. It is extremely desirable that thoughts should be written as they rise in the mind, because, if they are not recorded at the time, they may never return. "I attach so much importance to the ideas which come during the night, or in the morning," says Gaston Plante, the electrical engineer, "that I have always, at the head of my bed, paper and pencil suspended by string, by the help of which I write every morning the ideas I have been able to conceive, particularly upon subjects of scientific research. I write these notes in obscurity, and decipher and develop them in the morning, pen in hand." The philosopher Emerson took similar pains to catch a fleeting thought, for, whenever he had a happy idea, he wrote it down, and when Mrs. Emerson, startled in the night by some unusual sound, cried, "What is the matter? Are you ill?" the philosopher softly replied, "No, my dear; only an idea."

Thackeray confessed that the title for his novel, *Vanity Fair*, came to him in the middle of the night, and that he jumped out of bed and ran three times round the room, shouting the words. Whether in town or country, Landor reflected and composed habitually out walking, and therefore preferred at all times to walk alone. So did Buckle. Wordsworth was accustomed to compose his verse in his solitary walks, carry them in his memory, and get wife or daughter to write them down on his return. His excursions and peculiar habits gave rise to some anxious beliefs amongst the ignorant peasantry. Even his sanity was questioned. The peasantry of Rydal thought him "not quite hisself," because he always walked alone, and was met at odd times and in odd places. Some poets have been in the habit of humming or repeating their verses aloud as they composed them. Southey,

for instance, boomed his verses so as to be mistaken for a bittern booming by Wilson, who was a keen sportsman. If so, Southey's voice must not have been very harmonious, for the bittern is Shakespeare's "night-raven's dismal voice."

The question of the authorship of certain popular works has given rise to a great deal of speculation. A few months ago, the Americans were puzzling their brains to discover the name of the author of *The Breadwinners*. Amongst other stinging charges against him, to induce him to break the silence, was that it was a base and craven thing to publish a book anonymously! "My motive in withholding my name is simple enough," he said to his furious critics. "I am engaged in business in which my standing would be seriously compromised were it known that I had written a novel. I am sure that my practical efficiency is not lessened by this act, but I am equally sure that I could never recover from the injury it would occasion me if known among my own colleagues. For that positive reason, and for the negative one that I do not care for publicity, I resolved to keep the knowledge of my little venture in authorship restricted to as small a circle as possible. Only two persons beside myself know who wrote *The Breadwinners*."

A far more serious dispute followed the publication of the *Vestiges of Creation* forty years ago. The theologians of Scotland were wild with rage at the audacity of the author, who would have been torn to pieces had he been discovered. In scientific circles Mr. Robert Chambers was credited with the authorship; and Henry Greville seems to have had no doubt upon the matter. In *Leaves from the Diary of Henry Greville* there is an entry under the date December 28th, 1847, as follows: "I have been reading a novel called *Jane Eyre*, which is just now making a great sensation, and which absorbed and interested me more than any novel I can recollect having read. The author is unknown. Mrs. Butler—Miss Fanny Kemble—who is greatly struck by the talent of the book, fancies it is written by Chambers—who is author of the *Vestiges of Creation*—because she thinks that whoever wrote it must, from its language, be a Scotchman, and from its sentiments be a Unitarian; and Chambers, besides answering to all these peculiarities, has an intimate friend who believes in supernatural agencies, such as are described in the last

volume of the book." Thackeray also had the credit of the book.

Nobody knew Charlotte Brontë; but she was unable to keep the secret very long. The late R. H. Horne was present at that first dinner-party given by Mr. George Smith, the publisher, when Currer Bell, then in the first flush of her fame, made her earliest appearance in a London dining-room. She was anxious to preserve the anonymity of her literary character, and was introduced by her true name. Horne, however, who sat next to her, was so fortunate as to discover her identity. Just previously he had sent to the new author, under cover of her publisher, a copy of his *Orion*. In an unguarded moment Charlotte Brontë turned to him and said:

"I was so much obliged to you, Mr. Horne, for sending me your——" But she checked herself with an inward start, having thus exploded her Currer Bell secret by identifying herself with the author of *Jane Eyre*.

"Ah, Miss Brontë," whispered the innocent cause of the misfortune, "you would never do for treasons and stratagems!"

The late John Blackwood corresponded with George Eliot some time before he knew that she was a woman. He called her "Dear George," he says, and often used expressions which a man commonly uses only to a man! After he found out who "Dear George" was, he was naturally a little anxious to recall some of the expressions he had used. Charles Dickens, however, detected what escaped the observation of most people. Writing to a correspondent in January, 1858, he said: "Will you by such roundabout ways and methods as may present themselves convey this note of thanks to the author of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, whose two first stories I can never say enough of, I think them so truly admirable? But if those two volumes, or a part of them, were not written by a woman, then shall I begin to believe that I am a woman myself."

BELLONA'S WORKSHOPS.

THERE is no need to ask the way to the Arsenal, finding ourselves just outside Woolwich station shortly before two o'clock, post meridian, for all along the streets a general trudge is going on, tramp, tramp, through drizzle and mud, hundreds upon hundreds of men and boys all plodding in the same

direction. A solitary but active bell is raising a discordant clangour, to the music of which, if any music can be found in it, everybody sets his pace. The whole population of the town, indeed—the male population, that is, for among all the swarms of sad-coloured garments there is not the flutter of a petticoat to be seen, or the jaunty handkerchief of a factory-girl—all the gloomy crowd is moving upon one central spot, leaving only women and children to take care of the houses and mind the shops. A squad of artillerymen is marching in the same direction, and with a few other uniforms scattered here and there, gives the slightest military aspect to the scene; but the general crowd is not distinguished by any military smartness, being indeed rather slouching and depressed in general appearance.

The crowd that is marching back to work is indeed an army in point of numbers. Something like six thousand men are employed in the Arsenal, which is the one and only centre of manufacture of all kinds of warlike implements and equipage. And here we are at the main gate of the Arsenal—a gateway of homely red brick, with a couple of old-fashioned mortars gaping over the entrance, and a low tower at the side, within which the noisy bell can be seen vigorously wagging up and down. The main gate is held by a strong body of metropolitan police, who scrutinise every face as it passes the barrier. Within is a maze of sheds and shanties with tramways running in every direction, among which rise the handsome old brick buildings of the Georgian period, the officers' quarters, and the old gun foundry, built at a time when founding a gun was a species of solemnity almost like the launching of a ship.

The Arsenal has a history that carries us farther back than its Hanoverian buildings. Some kind of a dépôt of arms occupied a small portion of the present site from the days of Elizabeth and the Armada. A store-account of the reign of Elizabeth, taken at Woolwich, is still in existence, and specifies, "IV. backs and breasts for Almayne Corsletts, beside I. od backe. Lxxv. collers with bombards. xlviii. Burgonets and huskins. cccxxxiii. murrions blacke, and xii. Burgonets, old and nothing worth." And among the old buildings pulled down in the last century was a conspicuous tower, which bore the name of Prince Rupert's Tower, while somewhere among this maze of sheds and stores, a

footpath once existed, that was known as Prince Rupert's Walk. It is well-known that the old soldier, convinced by experience of the futility of mere cavalry charges, took much to science in his later days, and was curious in the matter of chemical compounds and explosives, and it is likely enough that the Prince made a beginning of the laboratory which has grown to such huge proportions.

All this time the site of the present arsenal was known as Tower Place or King's Warren. Rabbits frisked in the sunshine, and flashed in and out of sight where now great guns show black and ominous, and where the ground shakes under the blows of the steam-hammer. As early as 1668, guns, carriages, and stores were concentrated at Woolwich, and a quarter of a century later the royal laboratory, which had been established at Greenwich, was removed to the same neighbourhood. The big guns were still cast at Moorfields, in the foundry which was later to become famous as Wesley's first chapel, till an explosion in 1716, when the guns captured in Marlborough's victories were being recast, was the cause of the establishment being removed to Woolwich. The popular story of the young Flemish engineer who foretold the explosion, and was rewarded by being made chief of the works, has no distinct corroboration from contemporary records, but the hero of the story—one Schalch, of Douay—undoubtedly became the head of the new department. In 1741 an academy or school of gunnery was established in connection with the works, the embryo of the existing Royal Military Academy on Woolwich Common, which turns out all the engineer and artillery officers of the Queen's service. Finally, in 1805, the whole establishment was dignified with the name of the Royal Arsenal, and the forty-two acres of land which constituted the original Tower Place have expanded to the three hundred and thirty-three acres—be the same more or less—now covered by this great factory of warlike implements, probably the most extensive establishment of the kind in the world. Not that this country has by any means the monopoly of the manufacture of warlike engines, or that the great military nations of the Continent are much behind us in the application of machinery to war material, but that other nations have avoided a concentration of such establishments at one spot, the capture

of which or destruction by the enemy would paralyse the whole military force; while we, confiding in the immunities of our sea-girt isle, have collected all our Bellona's eggs into one basket.

The element of danger in this state of things has not escaped official recognition. A commission in 1860 recommended the establishment of a central arsenal and manufactory at Cannock Chase in Staffordshire, with plenty of the raw material and skilled labour close at hand, and this connected with a western arsenal at Runcorn. But these daring suggestions have never been carried out. And, after all, seeing that our warlike stores are mostly wanted for foreign expeditions, the advantage of having our arsenal placed upon our great river, and in immediate communication with all the executive departments of the administration, may be held to outweigh the undoubted risks referred to.

When the Dutch, in Charles the Second's time, sailed up the Thames and Medway, and burnt the ships in Chatham Dockyard, they were expected to pay a visit to Woolwich, and ships were sunk across the river channel to obstruct their progress. The damage then to be done by an enemy would have been trifling compared with what might be done now. But the development of torpedo systems has been so great of late years that it would be little short of madness on the part of a naval commander to bring his ships so far up an intricate channel, when once there had been the opportunity of planting it with torpedoes.

Anyhow, the approach to the nucleus of our national defences is not marked by lines of ramparts or redoubts, but by a strong body of the metropolitan police, far more effective, no doubt, against the secret foes, who, just now, are most to be dreaded. The bell has ceased its clangour, the workmen are at work, and the noise of engines and the hum of many wheels are to be heard. As we enter an immense machine-shed, where the primary work of bullet-making is going on upon a great scale, our guide leads the way to an inner room, on the door of which is marked, "Lead-squirting Room," as if there were beings within who amused themselves with Quilp-like malignity with squirting about the molten metal.

So far, the squirting seems to be of a harmless character. But on one side is a row of furnaces and cauldrons, which we may look upon with interest and awe.

Veritable witches-cauldrons are they, round about which the stern sisters, who ride on the battle-clouds and revel in human slaughter, might dance to ecstatic measure. For these cauldrons boil and bubble with the lead that shall hiss over the battle-fields of the future. The lives of brave men are bubbling in those fatal cauldrons.

The lead having been properly amalgamated, is now run into a sunken cylindrical holder, where, having been allowed to cool a little, so as to acquire a treacly consistency, an end is drawn through a funnel-shaped opening and pulled out in a bright, flexible rod, cooling as it goes—which some men now wind up on a big reel—a long, drawn, solid gas-pipe, only looking rather like silver than lead in its brightness. And we may follow this bright serpentine roll into the big bullet-factory beyond, where innumerable machines are waiting for it, to cut it into little quids, or chunks, bright still and innocent-looking, while, with here a bang and there a snip, the little innocent quid assumes the aspect of one of those bullets which peep so wickedly from the ends of the Martini cartridges.

In another shed thin sheets of brass are passing under the fingers of other machines, fed by boys and young men, and are punched and twisted into so many little brass cylinders, which are finished here and gauged there, and finally pass under the view of keen-eyed detectives, who, taking them up in batches of twenty or so, throw aside now and then a defective specimen, while the rest are shovelled into baskets and carried away. In another place are being made the capsules which close the cartridge with the strikers that are destined to explode the charge. The final meeting of brass case and leaden bullet with the villainous saltpetre that completes the charge is not effected within the walls of the Arsenal. Down there among the marshes are little detached sheds, where such more or less dangerous operations are conducted with all due regard for safety and privacy. Little accidents happen now and then, and once or twice in a lifetime such an explosion as that wild flight of war-rockets which scared all London, and gave Woolwich a notion of what a hostile attack might be like.

And in the way of brasswork, what marvelous finish and minuteness are there in the component parts of those fuses, destined for explosive missiles—time-fuses and percussion-fuses in all their varieties, with new varieties in process of being thought

out and elaborated, with all their delicate appliances. How far removed are all these from the primitive roughness of the early fuse—the plug of wood, with the morsel of slow-match inserted, cut long or short in the rough judgment of the artilleryman, and ignited by the flash of the discharge! But all our mechanical appliances have not got rid of the element of uncertainty in the fuse—dangerous even under careful management, as the recent sad accident at Shoeburyness conclusively shows.

From fuses we may move on to rifled shells, which have also reached an elaboration undreamed of by our earlier artillerymen. From the great furnaces molten iron runs out in a bright, glowing stream, with showers of hot, fiery stars flying in all directions—runs into the wheeled metal carriers, and is rolled off to the moulds, and poured into the elaborate cases, which squirm and squirt forth fire and flames in all directions. Often the shell is built up of various pieces—the interior filled with iron bullets in a resinous compôte suggestive of plum-jam, with a wooden cap to make all tight, and the conical point screwed upon the top of all. Before the case is filled, however, it is pitted at regular intervals, by the drilling-machine, with round holes, while another machine scoops out a groove round the bottom of each pit, and a third engine gives an inexorable thump to a copper stud, and drives it in with such force as to fill the inner groove, when the stud can be sooner torn asunder than plucked out. These are for the rifled guns, into the grooves of which the copper bolts are made to fit.

It is worth while here to pay a visit to the pattern-room of projectiles, where models of all the projectiles in use are carefully preserved in all the radiance of polish and lacquer; monster shells for the monster guns, dwindling down to the little steel-tipped spikes that do duty for the toy-like mountain guns. Here, indeed, are two lofty rooms filled with all kinds of death-dealing apparatus of the most elaborate structure, while in the lobby, by an unconscious satirical stroke, stand two primitive-looking tubes of simple construction, labelled as for "the preservation of life" in shipwrecks.

From the projectile-room, which somehow suggests the reptile-room of a great zoological collection, full of bright, shining things carefully wrapped up, so elegant and so deadly—from this we pass by a natural transition to the Royal Gun

Factory. Hitherto we have been engaged upon the Royal Laboratory—a strange name for such a manufactory of varied warlike stores—but the thing has grown up about the original laboratory, while the laboratory proper, the scene of experiments and tests, and general research into the properties of explosive compounds, occupies a neat, old-fashioned building all to itself, which is carefully closed against the outside world. Connected with the laboratory, too, are the torpedo works busily occupied with all such kinds of machines—torpedoes to be fired by electricity from fixed points; torpedoes to lie in wait in muddy channels, and explode at the first graze of a ship's keel; torpedoes to dart out fishlike upon a passing vessel. All the inventions which are destined probably to change the face of naval warfare, and render the ironclad war-ship as obsolete as the mailclad warrior, are here in course of manufacture, but, it may be said, on a very inadequate scale looking to the possible wants of the future.

But on the whole the Laboratory is a grand department, hardly to be equalled anywhere for beauty and nicety of machinery, with a potentiality of rapid production quite amazing. The rifle-shell factory, for instance, that we have just visited, with nearly a thousand machines of various kinds, can turn out somewhere about seven thousand projectiles of all kinds weekly, or not far from three hundred tons of metal. Then there are big sheds set apart for carpenters' work, to make all the innumerable cases and boxes required for the vast array of warlike stores. Here is box-making in its completest form, the rough plank cut, and shaved, and planed, and fitted, dovetailed, and joined together, and turned out strong, and smooth, and perfect, by a series of ingenious machines—over a hundred in number—of which the human artificers seem only the humble, obedient servants. Then there is a brass foundry supplying castings for fuses, taps, joints, and all kinds of minute appliances, and other minor departments exist, of which only the superintending officers could give a detailed account.

The regular staff which controls and manipulates all this complicated array of semi-intelligent machinery, consists of two artillery officers in chief command, forty clerks and writers, thirty masters, five hundred and sixty-nine artificers, and about eighteen hundred labourers. And the

importance of this great branch of the Arsenal may be judged from the Estimates, in which we shall find that out of about one million one hundred thousand pounds devoted to the manufacture of war material, nearly one-half—in round numbers, upwards of half a million—is expended upon the laboratory.

And now for the Gun Factory, the gates of which have been gaping for us while engaged upon this short statistical excursion—the great Gun Factory, which presents more striking and picturesque features than any other part of the establishment. Here are great masses of metal glowing with a dull red heat, which are gradually being beaten into shape under the thunderous blows of mighty steam-hammers. There is one of these hammers—the father of them all—that gives a crunch of thirty-tons power, and that will also gently crack the top of an egg without smashing it. In another place a score of men are clinging about a great beam, at the end of which is a more shapely mass of iron, in which the lineaments of some death-dealer of the future can be vaguely traced. The master-smith, with muffled face and hands, approaches the glowing monster. He lays a cutting-edge upon it—a cheese-cutter, with a long rod by way of handle, the steam-hammer gives a gentle tap, just to make sure that everything is plumb centre, and then, with a thump that shakes the earth, the knife is driven into the hot metal, as if it were so much cheese. A twist by the score of brawny arms, another tap, another thump, and the cheese-cutting goes on apace. Elsewhere a great breech-piece is slowly twirling in the lathe, while shavings of bright metal twirl from its polished side. Again, a steel tube is being bored and rifled, while in another place a great coil of wrought iron is being welded into one homogeneous mass.

To deal once more a little with statistics, the royal gun-factories consist of forges, smith's shop, rolling mills, pattern shop, brass and iron foundry, gun-boring mill, tool rooms, turneries, lighting room, field gun section engine repairing shop, with other branches. In these various departments are at work some six hundred machines, lathes, and boring machines, drilling machines, other machines for riding, planing, slotting, shaping, milling, screwing, lopping, and wheel-cutting. Twenty weighing machines record and regulate the production; two circular saws

are at work, and two hundred and forty vices are waiting to grip anything they can get hold of. Then fifty-four furnaces continually do blow, with the aid of six blowing fans, while there is engine-power to the extent of seven hundred horses, and boiler-power to a much greater extent. And the factories can produce six thousand tons of guns, from the light mountain howitzer to be carried on the back of a mule, to the latest Woolwich Infant of eighty tons or more. At the head of the factories are two or more artillery officers, while the general staff consists of twenty-four clerks, draughtsmen, and timekeepers, twenty-four foremen, three hundred and eighty-six artificers, and five hundred and seventy-one labourers and boys; while as for total annual cost, the guns take in round numbers a quarter of a million from the annual estimates.

There is a skeleton, however, in the factory cupboard, a startling kind of memento that the best of guns, so considered, may fail at a pinch, in the shape of the burst gun of the Thunderer, which occupies a quiet but instructive corner; its jacket rent, its breechpiece shattered, and all its cunning coils and weldings torn asunder. A double charge rammed in, one on top of the other, say the authorities, in explanation of the burst. And yet similar guns have been treble charged, and have stood the shock without damage. Anyhow, the big gun problem seems not yet thoroughly solved, and the manufacture not to have reached the perfection of other branches of ordnance.

From the heat of the furnaces, the glow of the red-hot guns, and the crash of the steam-hammers, it is a pleasant relief to come out upon the wharves and quays, cumbered with great packages marked in great black letters—Principal Medical Officer, Principal Commissariat Officer, Commanding Officer Royal Artillery, Commanding Officer Royal Engineers, all labelled Suakin, while from the river beyond, gleaming yellow and turbid through the haze, rise the black funnels of the transports. Derricks and cranes are swinging their loads on high, and the cheery yo-heave-ho of the sailors mingles with the rattling of chains and blocks. A sort of Shetland pony in the way of a locomotive is prancing along the railway line, with a lot of railway-trucks in tow—full-sized trucks which are running on the broader gauge, and another lilliputian engine is rushing at us from a siding with its train of diminutive

waggons, shrieking to everybody to get out of the way.

And now we are in the domain of the storekeeping branch—an important one in its way—which deals with all the munitions of war, when they leave the various factories, and forwards them to their destinations, or keeps them in store for future needs. This is the department of Commissaries of Ordnance—who must not be confounded with Commissariat Commissaries—under whom is a considerable staff—between seven and eight hundred—of artificers, labourers, women, and girls. And beyond the Ordnance premises are the commissariat hay stores, where the compressed hay for the use of the expedition is being packed by hydraulic presses.

There is one quiet corner in the midst of all this bustle, and this is known as the cemetery, where the rude forefathers of the present race of guns sleep peacefully side by side, the relics of a less scientific age, when people were content to be knocked to pieces with less elaborate appliances. It is not an unmixed gain, perhaps, all this complicated machinery of war. The Arab, who starts on his campaign with a bag of dates and a goatskin filled with water flung over his saddle-bow, has certain advantages in the desert over Tom Atkins with the long train of equipages and stores of all kinds lumbering behind him. And some of these old guns that were burst in the fifties seem to carry us back half-way to the era of dates and water-skins. Those Crimean days, for instance, when half the army were still armed with Brown Bess, and bit the ends off their brown paper cartridges, and rammed down the bullets which were made obligingly loose to save trouble with iron ramrods, and wore pouches for percussion-caps, and blazed away into the blue without troubling themselves about sights front or back, or judging distances, and were knocked over with round shot fired from common cast-iron guns.

The last great department of the Arsenal is still to be visited, the Royal Carriage Works, which have nothing to do with those royal carriages which roll so smartly along with princes of the blood, and lords and ladies of the bedchamber; but of those more stern and sombre vehicles which show best amid the smoke and dust of battle.

Behold the ordnance on their carriage
Gaping with fatal mouths.

And here we have forges and furnaces,

with steam-hammer foundries and saw-mills; machines of all kinds for forging, nut and bolt making, riveting, shearing, punching, cutting, planing; lathes, drills, circular saws, with many others whose purposes would only be known to the initiated. Here is one floor devoted entirely to wheels, the spokes, felloes, and tires, all of which are turned out by ingenious machines with a little human supervision. From the carriage-factory can be turned out each year sixty-five field batteries amply equipped, a hundred and eighty naval or garrison carriages, with slides or platforms, twenty-four turret-carriages, three hundred and sixty transport-carriages. The department is worked by a staff of two or three artillery officers, a civil manager and assistant, thirty-eight clerks and writers, thirty-eight masters and foremen, some eight hundred artificers, and four hundred and fifty labourers and boys.

Here, too, we meet with ambulance waggons, with their swing-cots for the badly wounded, carts for provender, carts for the field-train, general shandrydans, and ammunition-waggons. Here, too, we find the hospital fittings, down to the operating-table with its painful suggestions.

With all its numerous functions the carriage-factory is naturally one of the money-spending departments, and its normal cost is some thousands over the quarter of a million expended by the gun-factory. But the three departments, laboratory, gun, and carriage, account for the greater part of the cost of war materials—the remaining items of any consequence being the rifle manufactory at Enfield, another small arm establishment at Birmingham, and the gunpowder factory at Waltham, which, among them, spend annually a couple of hundred thousand, more or less, but generally more, by ten or twenty thousand pounds.

Among other curious sights of the Royal Arsenal are the stores for the equipment of cavalry and transport, with an array of all kinds of saddles—pack-saddles, draught harness, and all other sorts of horse-gear. Here stand stirrup-irons in columns reaching up to the roof, and the ceiling itself is composed of cavalry bits, whose embossed cheek-plates form a kind of fretted vaulting overhead. Bridle-chains and halters hang there, too, in their thousands, and there is an atmosphere of quietude and repose about these regions which is quite refresh-

ing after the roar and bustle of the factories.

For there the wheels are ever whirling, the furnaces ever roaring, the steam-hammers thumping night and day, without haste, but without rest. There is something fateful and imposing indeed in all this busy hum and whirl—in the anxious pressure of never-resting toil. Night and day the great complicated machine is at work, making up for lost time, preparing for eventualities which are still hidden in the mist of futurity. If there are any rabbits still left underground in the old king's warren, even they might form an idea from the continual tramp and thump overhead that unquietude reigned among the human swarm above. With peace and prosperity the machine grinds slowly, one wheel after another is stopped, the furnaces grow cold, a sort of lassitude creeps over the place. Then some note of danger sounds, or come some tidings of alarm. The wheels begin again, whirling and whizzing as if weaving the web of fate. The hammer of Thor is heard, furnaces roar, and the bright metal leaps forth in continual jets of flame.

WHICH OF THEM?

A STORY IN TEN CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

THE party assembled round the Woodlands breakfast-table next morning eyed each other with suppressed interest, intensified in Lucy by the sense that her own fate was wrapped up in the handkerchief which it was for her uncle, and not for her, to throw. The young men, of course, did not know that the lady was one of the fixtures that went with the property; but they all had a very good guess that to win the one would be the chief step towards winning the other. Yorkshire Alan did not care very much about either. Large-limbed and rather loosely built, with light brown hair and grey eyes, he carried about with him a breath from his native moors, and there seemed something incongruous in the idea of putting him into a merchant's office. Neither did he wish it. His head was full of Canada, and the great things he was going to do there; he would not have given a thank-you to be made master of all Gracechurch Street, and he did not want to be married. He grudged a month away from the home he was to leave next spring, and only his father's commands—and the partridges—had brought him to Surrey at all.

Alan from Kensington had very little anxiety. He was, when he chose, a ladies' man; he knew how to make himself agreeable to old fellows—one had only to call them "sir," agree with all they said, and listen to all their old stories; business would be a bore, but he could soon get it up from the clerks; and, as cause and motive of all this exertion, he was deeply in debt. If no lucky fate had come to his rescue, an era of retrenchment, shabbiness, perhaps even retirement to the Continent, must sooner or later have arrived. But now there would be no come-down in merging the close of a showy youth into the solid prosperity of mercantile life. With a handsome house in London, a place in the country, and a pretty and lady-like wife, a man of his style could keep any company he chose, and he chose to keep very good company, though he could not always get it. The old boy was going off the hooks very opportunely, and even if he delayed the final act, the report of Kensington's heirship would be nearly as satisfactory to his creditors as the fact. It ought not to be omitted that he was tall and dark, carried himself like a man who had been trained in athletics at Harrow and Cambridge, always knew the right thing to wear, and generally the right thing to say.

Alan from Brixton was much the least gentlemanly of the three. His dusky hair and pale complexion carried an everlasting reminder of the shop and the desk. He was undisguisedly eager to make a favourable impression, and miserably uncertain how to set about doing it. His commercially-trained mind appreciated to the full the greatness of his uncle. He bowed down and worshipped before the closed door of that shrine of the goddess Business in Gracechurch Street, into which his father had long ago striven in vain to obtain for him an entrance. To hold the key thereof as master and high priest was a height of glory, the very thought of which made him dizzy, and yet eager. To him alone of the cousins, his uncle's work would be no drawback from his uncle's fortune. But just now, while a glorious hope fluttered its bright wings before him, a miserable little worm was secretly gnawing at his heart. In other words, he was extremely uncomfortable at the prospect of the day's shooting. He had done his very best, though, to rise to the occasion. He had fitted himself out from top to toe at the right shop in the Strand, and now appeared in a heather-

coloured shooting-suit, which shouted its newness from every crease—his thin legs encased in thick ribbed stockings, calculated to protect them against the chill blasts of early September and the fierce assaults of turnip-leaves. He had acquainted himself with the use of arms by diligent practice at a shooting-gallery every evening since he received his uncle's invitation, and his success had been such that he thought he need not quail before any bird or any keeper. But nevertheless he did quail.

Breakfast was rapidly dispatched, and soon the four Alan Marstons were crunching the crisp stubble under their feet, brushing through the yellowing turnips, and breathing the frost-chilled, sun-warmed air of a perfect autumn morning.

The birds sprang up into the wind, the blue puffs of smoke melted one after the other into the mild haze of the distance. The sport was good; the dogs were better than could have been expected on the First; and, in due time, the lunch was excellent.

But the enjoyment had by no means been equally distributed when that period of repose arrived.

Very soon after the start, a covey rose within easy shot of Mr. Marston. He threw up his gun and fired instantly, but missed them. Not a bird fell. Yorkshire Alan, who was next to him, and had noticed a slight trembling of his hand when loading, was not surprised; but the old man was.

"Missed them!" he said disconsolately. "And what a shot! Don't know how I could have done it. Am I breaking up so soon?"

"Not a bit, sir," returned old Willy, the head-keeper. "It was that bit of a branch coming down of a sudden between you and them; it put you out. It would have put out anybody."

"Oh, a branch, was it?" repeated Mr. Marston vaguely, puzzled, but somewhat comforted.

Alan and the keeper interchanged glances, and Alan took his part. He kept thenceforward close behind his uncle, and fired as nearly as possible at the same time. In the resulting confusion as to the ownership of the shot birds, Mr. Marston was easily satisfied that he had killed more than his share, and he was perfectly happy.

Kensington went striding along by himself, paying very little attention to what anyone else was doing, and acquitting

himself very well. He highly approved of the way in which his uncle had worked up the partridges, and resolved that when he was master, he would retain the keepers, and stock the plantations with pheasants.

But sore were the tribulations of him of Brixton. He walked along, clutching his gun with an air of stern determination, and keeping his eye on Kensington, in order to do exactly as he did. Up went Kensington's gun, and up went Brixton's; bang went the one, and bang went the other; a partridge fell fluttering to the earth, and two grains of shot riddled Kensington's hat. He looked round with an angry word and saw Brixton staring up into the sky, and then all around, to see what he had shot.

"You hit black game that time," he remarked coolly. "Next time you'll oblige me by aiming at my hat, instead of my birds; it will be safer, and my life is not insured."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," stammered the unfortunate sportsman, smothered in confusion.

"You'd better show Mr. Marston the way about, Hopkins," Kensington observed to the under-keeper; "he hasn't been out before."

"Yes, sir," rejoined Hopkins. "You see, sir," he went on, addressing Brixton, "you mustn't fire at the other gentleman's birds; you and me'll go along the other side of this field, and whatever gets up you can go at without interfering with him. There!"

Whiz! Whirr! Scud!

"Where—where?" gasped Brixton, putting up his gun slowly, and looking in every direction but the right one.

"In the next county now, sir, unless one of the other gentlemen has got them. There go shots! I'll bet old master hasn't let them pass. You must keep your eyes better peeled next time, sir."

Brixton now kept a sharp look-out, turning his head from side to side, like a demented sparrow, and was rewarded by being the first to see a bird fly over the hedge into his field, a little way in front of him. He fired, and, strange to say, the bird fell. Any jury of its peers would certainly have brought in a verdict of contributory negligence. However, Brixton had incontestably shot something, and Hopkins went to pick it up.

"These things only want a little practice," observed the sportsman with mild elation, putting down his gun and rubbing his hand, which was rather cramped. "I was sure I should soon get into the way of it."

Hopkins picked up the booty and burst into an undisguised guffaw.

"It's a crow, Mr. Marston! I beg your pardon, sir, but I can't help it. What'll the master say to going out partridge-shooting and bringing home nothing but an old crow?" And he roared again.

"There—there," said Brixton, rather cross; "that's enough about it. I fired in a hurry and didn't wait to look. Throw the thing into the ditch. I dare say my uncle doesn't want such vermin about his farm."

"No, sir," said Hopkins, subduing his emotion; "but he don't need to get down gentlemen from London to shoot them."

"Well, let it alone. Here, you may as well carry this gun a bit; I'm not very well to-day, and it tires me. And if you see a partridge you may as well shoot it, you know."

Hopkins responded with a respectful affirmative as one of Brixton's few half-sovereigns changed hands; and thus it came to pass that Brixton did not present himself empty-handed when Lucy and luncheon appeared together, although the crow reposed in a neglected grave.

After luncheon, Kensington shot worse, and Yorkshire rather better; for the latter knew what the former did not—how very little wine it takes to make a man shoot behind his birds, and, having to sustain the reputation of two, he did his very best. Nevertheless, the bag was not so full as it would have been if Mr. Marston had hit more than once in five times. But he came home well satisfied with himself, and not ill-satisfied with his nephews.

"Did you have a good day, uncle?" enquired Lucy, meeting them at the door.

"A capital day, my dear—as good as ever I had in my life. I began badly, but I soon warmed to my work, and then I think the old man showed the young ones a thing or two. Here are forty-five brace, and a couple of hares—not so bad for four guns, considering. Kensington here is a capital shot, fourteen brace fell to his gun; and your cousin from Yorkshire knows what he's about, though somehow he didn't seem to have luck to-day. Too near my old Westley Richards—eh, my boy?"

"I can't say that I distinguished myself anyhow, sir," answered the young man gaily.

"And how did you get on?" asked Lucy, turning to Brixton.

"Ah, well, I'm not much used to this sort of thing, Miss Lucy. Still, I did manage to hit something."

A queer sort of gulp was heard, and Hopkins's life seemed in imminent danger from a sudden and violent fit of coughing.

"Yes," added his uncle, "he didn't do at all badly for a beginner. Two brace and a half were his bag, and if he can do that on his first day out, he'll be a crack shot yet."

The sportsmen went to their rooms, and Lucy meditatively surveyed the pile of ruffled feathers and hanging heads, with a sentiment of sorrow for the pretty little lives cut short, and a calculation of how many ought to be kept for use in the house, and how many sent away as presents.

"I wonder, Willy," she said suddenly, "that Mr. Marston from Yorkshire didn't do better. He looks like a man who ought to be able to shoot."

"Bless you, so he can, miss, and first-rate at that. Fact is, him and me's playing a little game. Master, he warn't himself, and he missed his first bird—as easy a shot as ever you see. You could have hit it yourself, miss." Lucy laughed, and shook her head. "And I persuaded him it was a falling branch put him out, and then I give young Mr. Marston the tip, and he kept close by the old gentleman, and fired when he did, and down went the birds like drops of rain. I don't believe he missed three times all day; and master, he thought he'd killed them nearly all himself, miss. He was as pleased as Punch, but he gave the young gentleman one every now and then. I couldn't but laugh a little to myself, miss; but for all that, I can't bear to see him breaking up."

"It was very nice of my cousin," said Lucy tremulously. "Mind you never let my uncle know, though, or that would spoil it all."

Willy swore secrecy, and retired to discuss with Hopkins the events of the day, of which they two between them knew more than anyone else. For in the confusion of white lies that clustered round the bag, if each victim had claimed to know its slaughterer, the keepers alone could have answered its plaintive question—Which of them?

CHAPTER IV.

THE month of September drew towards an end, and Mr. Marston had given no sign of his choice. The young men had made themselves at home at Woodlands in their several ways, and had got on fairly well together. Their uncle had decidedly gone down the hill, though not rapidly,

and had soon given up the shooting; but he was always eager that they should shoot over his fields or his neighbours', and liked hearing them describe and praise their sport. It often seemed as if he liked Yorkshire Alan best; he took a pleasure in the young fellow's simplicity and manliness, and liked to make him talk about Yorkshire, and the brother of whom he had seen so little since the currents of life had carried them apart. Brixton, however, soon made himself useful in writing the business letters for which Lucy's feminine caligraphy disqualified her; and gradually his uncle seemed to look to him naturally for assistance, and to trust him more and more in the task of putting his affairs into order. Brixton already felt himself his successor; and in the meantime he was saved many a painful—and expensive—day's shooting, by the plea that he was wanted—or likely to be wanted—in the study. Kensington had carved out no special niche for himself, but he made himself agreeable all round; he made conversation for his uncle, read poetry and gave drawing-lessons to Lucy, and even instructed Brixton in the art of bringing down partridges, instead of crows. It never for a moment occurred to him that he could be unsuccessful, but it did sometimes occur to him that his rate of progress was not commensurate with efforts to please of which he was rather ashamed. Something of this he expressed one morning to his valet and partial confidant, who had excellent reasons of his own for being profoundly interested in his master's success.

"This is slow work, Horton, and I'm getting sick of it."

"It is dull down here in the country, sir; I feel it so myself," responded Horton.

"Pish! I don't mean that. I mean it's time to get something settled. Here we are within a week of October, and as soon as I go back to town those beasts of duns will be on me like a swarm of flies. I must bring things to a point."

"Do you generally strike when your fish is light-hooked, sir; and what happens when you do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the old gentleman is one that won't be driven, and the more you try to make him say that you're his choice, the more likely he is to throw you out of it altogether."

"I can't say that I have the least fear of such a contingency, Horton," returned Kensington stiffly. "Besides, I should

not think of speaking to him about his property. But I intend to propose to Miss Scott, and I imagine she carries most of it in her pocket."

"You'll put all the fat in the fire, sir, if you do," the valet replied with energy. "He means to give her away, not to let her give herself. There's one going to spoil himself at that game already. You stay still and let him do it."

"What, that lout from Yorkshire?"

"Just him, sir. Isn't he always round about with Miss Scott, helping her in the garden, taking walks in the lanes? Oh, a great deal more goes on than you see. Just you watch how they look at each other."

"The scoundrel! The more reason I should cut him out."

"It's gone too far, sir. You see here. The Yorkshireman's gone in for the lady, and made love to her without asking leave; that'll drive your uncle mad, when he knows it, which we'll attend to. Then there's the clerk from Brixton; he's made up to the uncle, and let the lady alone; that disgusts her, and she'll hardly let him come near her. Wait till Mr. Marston throws the Yorkshireman out of the house, and Miss Scott vows she won't marry the clerk. Then you step in, after making yourself pleasant to both and disagreeable to neither, and they both settle down on you."

"Very fine; but it's just as likely that the girl will run away with the Yorkshireman, and my uncle leave everything to the clerk, if I let it all slip through my fingers. No; I shall settle it with her at once, and then she'll know how to manage my uncle."

"You fool!" observed the servant as the master departed.

Breakfast was not quite ready, and Lucy, in hat and shawl, was visible at the end of a garden-walk. Kensington seized his opportunity, and found her cutting Gloire de Dijon roses. Instantly, of course, he broke out:

"Ah, one rose, one rose, by those fair fingers culled, Were worth a hundred kisses pressed on lips Less exquisite than thine."

"I don't see that you are called upon to choose," returned Lucy, laughing.

"I am called upon to supplicate, though. Won't you give me the rose?"

"What, one of the very last on the bush! I should think not. But if you want something for your button-hole, you may cut a little red one off that bush near the breakfast-room window."

"I do not care for roses unless you give them to me, nor for anything else that does not come through your sweet hands."

"What, nothing?"

Lucy glanced a whimsical interrogation at him, but he took no notice.

"Lucy, it is not possible that you should not have guessed what I feel for you. I have held back as long as possible, fearing that you would think our acquaintance too short; but now I can keep silence no longer. May I not speak?"

Lucy arranged her roses with elaborate care, and left it to his choice.

"You have altered the world for me; you have shown me a new life. I have seen many beautiful women before, but never one who drew me irresistibly, by her purity and sweetness, towards all my higher aspirations, and impelled me to realise them in a happy home-life by her side. Lucy, you alone can make me all I might be. I can make you no better than you are, for that is impossible; but I can put you on a pedestal, where you will shine as a star, and the world will worship you."

"Sitting on a lamp-post! Thank you, cousin."

"Lucy, I am not joking. Tell me that you will be my wife."

"That is serious, certainly. Seriously, then, I can give you no answer. You must speak to my uncle."

"And if he consents, you will?"

"I don't say that; but, if he doesn't consent, I won't."

"But I may tell him that you can love me?"

"Certainly not. Tell him what you choose about yourself, and I will tell him what I choose about myself."

"Then you send me away without one word of encouragement? How can I have the courage to go to him?"

Lucy hesitated a moment; then a wicked gleam came into her eyes. She picked out a rosebud from her bunch, and tossed it to him. He fastened it triumphantly in his coat as the breakfast-bell rang, and Yorkshire Alan glowered at it suspiciously all the morning. I fear Miss Lucy was a bit of a flirt.

She was a forgetful damsel, also; for that evening, when she said good-night, she left her work lying about untidily in the drawing-room. Now, she was usually very orderly in her habits, and therefore it was necessary for her peace of mind that she should come back in about half an hour to look for it. When she did, her uncle

was gone to bed, Kensington and Brixton were in the billiard-room, and Yorkshire sat alone finishing a novel in the drawing-room. It is possible that these circumstances were not all purely accidental, nor impossible to foresee.

Yorkshire threw down his book and caught her in his arms.

"At last, my darling!"

"Oh, Alan, don't!"

"Why not, my own love?"

"I ought not, while uncle does not know."

"I'm ready to tell him to-morrow. I'll tell him to-night, if he isn't in bed."

He made a movement to the door, but Lucy caught his arm.

"Don't be so silly! Leave that to Kensington."

"What! has he——?"

Lucy nodded.

"Did you know he was going to?"

"I told him he must."

"You did? Then that was what the rose meant! Oh, Lucy, I would not have believed it!"

"Why not?" said Lucy. "I meant no harm, and I said nothing that was not true. I wanted to get him out of our way; he asked me to be his wife, and I told him I couldn't without uncle's consent, and I wouldn't say that I would, even with it. So he went and spoke to uncle this afternoon; and of course uncle was in a rage at his having spoken to me, and now he has not a chance. He won't interfere with you any more, and I think you ought to be pleased."

"So I am; only I wish he hadn't your rose."

"It isn't an autograph; and, besides, he won't keep it. He isn't of the sentimental sort, though he gets it up very well. All he wants is the money."

"And all I want is you. Kensington may have blundered, but he did the straightforward thing; let me do it too."

"Then you would offend uncle mortally. Don't you see, Alan—it seems horrid to say it—but he does enjoy keeping you three in suspense, as he thinks, waiting to see what he will do. He likes to feel the power that he has, and he won't give it up in a hurry."

"And I don't want him to think that I am hanging round waiting for a chance to step into his shoes. All I want is your promise to come out to me when I have made a home in Canada; then I will tell him we are engaged, and he may leave his

money to Kensington and Brixton, and welcome."

"You'll insult him. Do you suppose he does not think his beloved business, which he made himself, worth twice as much as any girl?"

"If he knows no better than that, it is time I taught him. I don't want his business, and I shall tell him so."

"Then you had better tell him that you don't want me, for he would never let you have the one without the other."

"But, Lucy, you are not a slave. Give me your word, my sweet one, and then it does not matter what he says. I don't want you to leave him now, so what need of his consent?"

"Oh, Alan, I have never disobeyed uncle. I could not now, when he is dying."

"Then will you marry Brixton, if he leaves you to him in his will?"

"Never, never—nor anyone but you, Alan. But I can't promise anything more; we must wait, we must be patient; give uncle his own way, and it will all come right. He must see that you are the best."

All Yorkshire's entreaties and almost anger could get no more out of her; she absolutely did not know how to resist her uncle. Nevertheless, it was evident that—on one side at least—some progress had been made towards deciding the great question—Which of them?

LADY LOVELACE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JUDITH WYNNE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XLI.

EDIE had her "long and serious" illness, but, in spite of the vicar's prophecy, it may be questioned whether it would have occurred just then, had not a rather severe form of typhoid fever broken out in the village. Edie, scorning to discontinue her ministrations ("Just when they were most needed," as she explained to Mr. Rumsey), and not being quite up to her usual standard of health, was naturally one of the first to take the infection.

It ran its usual course, marked by an immense amount of kindly solicitude from Edie's friends and neighbours, rich and poor; for Edie, in spite of her many and serious faults of character, had somehow a knack of winning hearts which more faultless persons occasionally lack.

The squire's anxiety over his little daughter was at once ludicrous and pathetic.

He did his best to retard her recovery—as the doctor was at length compelled to inform him—by sitting all day long at her bedside holding her hand and imploring her to get well. And when a change for the better had evidently set in, he nearly made the nurse jump out of her bib and apron by suggesting that he should be there and then allowed to carry Edie downstairs and deposit her on the sofa in the library, for he was confident she would get round fifty times as quickly in the lighter, brighter room below, with the dogs and other signs of life about her.

The “getting round,” after all, proved to be the longest and most wearisome part of Edie’s illness. Without any apparent reason for weakness or languor, somehow both continued to hold sway over her. When by rights she ought to have been going cheerily about once more, feeding her birds, rubbing Coquette’s nose, scolding Janet, or laughing at the vicar’s “jokes,” she was instead lying limply in an easy-chair in her own room, or shivering in a big shawl on a sofa beside a blazing fire.

The old doctor grew puzzled, and shook his head at her. Edie shook her head at herself—mentally, and not having an ounce of sentimental compassion for herself in her whole composition, grew furious and irritable by turns.

“Why don’t I get well—why can’t I—what is there to prevent me?” she would say a hundred times a day to Janet or anybody else who did not dare to impose silence upon her. Then to herself she would add: “I know it can’t be because I’m grieving after Phil, because long ago, before I was taken ill, I made up my mind to leave off caring two straws for him.”

Phil had not been informed of Edie’s illness. Mr. Fairfax, so long as the fever lasted, had been far too anxious for his little daughter to have a thought for anyone or anything else in his mind; and Colonel Wickham had not felt inclined to do so ever since, about a day or so before Edie fell ill, he had had a slip of a note from Phil announcing the fact of his engagement to Miss Yorke.

The announcement fairly took the Colonel’s breath away. When his amazement subsided, indignation took its place.

“How dared he,” he stormed to himself, as he walked hurriedly backwards and forwards in Blue-book Parlour, “rush from the arms of one girl into those of another! How could he—didn’t he know true gold from false, diamonds from cut glass?”

Phil had no answer to his note—never a line civil or savage. But it may be questioned whether, absorbed as he was in his delirium of passion, he so much as noted the fact.

After Edie had turned the corner of her fever, and ought to have been making strides towards recovery, the Squire began to think of Phil.

“Tell you what, Edie,” he said blandly, unconscious of the old wounds he was probing, “I believe you’d get well as fast again if you had Master Phil down here to squabble with. I shall just send him a line in spite of your orders——”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort, papa!” exclaimed Edie vehemently. “When will you understand—why won’t you understand that Phil and I grew sick and tired of each other, and are nothing more than friends now? Do you hear, papa—you are not to write!”

And Edie grew so peremptory and excited over the matter, that the Squire was fain to promise that he “wouldn’t write to Phil; there, not without your permission, dear—there—never again, if you don’t wish it. There, will that do?”

But when Colonel Wickham called about half an hour afterwards to see Edie, her excitement and peremptoriness had vanished, and she was lying back on her sofa with her wraps about her, looking very white and weary.

One hand was pressed across her eyes as though her head were aching.

“Papa always tires me,” she said complainingly. “Oh, why can’t I get well! I’m sure I’ve tried hard enough!”

Colonel Wickham looked at her anxiously.

“You ought to have a change of scene, Edie,” he began.

Edie let her hand fall from her eyes.

“Oh, it isn’t that—but I do feel so worried, so bothered—papa is always teasing me about——” Here she broke off abruptly, made a huge effort, and brought out the rest of her sentence in a lump: “About Phil, and he won’t understand everything is at an end between us.”

“He must be made to understand,” said Colonel Wickham gravely, thinking of Phil’s slip of a note, and how the news it contained could be best broken to Edie before a rougher tongue could find opportunity to blurt it out.

“I am always trying to make him,” said Edie wearily. “The end will be that I shall have to marry someone else, to prove to him I don’t mean to marry Phil.”

Poor child! She did not look much like marrying anybody, with that white, tired look on her face, and her invalid wraps muffling her right up to the chin.

"Don't do anything in a hurry, Edie! It's this making haste over things that causes half the troubles in life," said the Colonel, still with Phil's slip of a note in his mind.

But Edie was just then inclined to be in a hurry, and nothing short of a padlock would have kept her next words in. A sudden thought had come to her—a thought which, to say truth, had more than once flitted in and out of her brain.

"I do so wish, Colonel Wickham," she said, speaking very fast, but withal without the slightest shade of embarrassment, "you would let me be engaged to you; it would put an end to such a lot of botheration and worry—don't you see?"

It was said boldly, innocently, with the sweet unconsciousness of a child at a dinner-table, who will make the faces of all the "grown-ups" crimson with his naive breaking of the seals of forbidden subjects.

Colonel Wickham gave a great start. Then he stood staring at her fixedly. Here, indeed, was an answer, and an effectual one, to the question wherewith he had been torturing himself off and on ever since his interview with Phil in London. Not the biggest coxcomb in the world could by any amount of twisting or turning of Edie's voice, look, manner, have got the faintest suspicion of love-making out of them.

His face grew long and troubled, but somehow words would not come to his lips.

Edie began to feel a little uncomfortable, and tried to make apologies.

"I'm so sorry if I've made you wretched; I'm always saying things I oughtn't to say. Please don't think any more about it. Of course I didn't mean anything more than being engaged. Nothing else for a moment came into my mind—the idea of marrying you, of course, would be ridiculous."

It was all said with that fine brutal frankness in which girls under twenty are adepts.

Colonel Wickham found his voice.

"I understood your meaning thoroughly, my child. It was easy enough to understand," he said sadly. It was easy enough to understand, not a doubt; but, nevertheless, the sweet delusion he had let into his heart was dying hard.

Edie brightened again.

"Yes; I felt sure you would understand what I meant. You see it would stop all papa's teasing, and—and—" Here she hesitated, broke off, mentally told herself she was a little simpleton for not being able to mention Phil's name, finally got together every atom of will she possessed and brought out the sentence: "And it would make Phil feel as free as air."

Colonel Wickham grew graver and graver.

"I am afraid he has felt free as air for some time past, Edie—ever since your letter of dismissal at the beginning of the year," he said.

Edie looked up sharply.

"Is he going to be married?" she asked, catching at his meaning swift as a bird at its prey.

There was no retreating now from his words, so he thought it best to tell her the truth right out.

"Some time ago I heard from him that he was engaged to be married," he answered.

"To Ellinor Yorke?" in the same swift tone as before.

"Yes, to Ellinor Yorke. But what made you think of her, Edie?"

Edie made no reply. She leaned as far back among her pillows as the sofa-arm would let her, closed her eyes, and said in a weak, quiet voice:

"I'm so tired; I think I should like to go to sleep for a little while."

Colonel Wickham rose instantly.

"I'll ring for Janet to come and sit with you," he said, then paused for a moment, looking down on her pityingly, wonderingly, heart-brokenly. Ghosts of "twenty years ago" began to rise up and crowd about him. The mists of memory lifted for an instant from off a sunny little stretch of landscape—ah me, now so distant and dim! How like the dead love she looked as she lay back with her eyes closed, and that sweet soft colour coming and going! How he yearned to comfort her, to give back to her the happiness which, it seemed to him, with foolish hands she had put away from herself!

A sudden impulse moved him. He went close to her side, took her hand in his, and bent low over her.

"Edie," he said earnestly, "tell me the whole story of your broken engagement with Phil. Trust me with it. It can't do any harm to tell it out now."

Edie opened her eyes.

"I thought you had gone," she said wearily. "Oh, do let me go to sleep." Then her eyes closed again.

He made one step towards the door.

"Colonel Wickham!" she called softly, and he was back by her side in a moment; "will you mind letting us be engaged to each other—for a time, that is? It will save such a lot of worry and botheration."

"So much cross-questioning from papa—put a stop to all his volleys of indignation against Phil—silence all the old maids in Stanham with their imitation pity, and hints about willow-trees," she would have said had she undertaken to paraphrase her words.

"If you wish it, Edie—if you wish it," answered the Colonel slowly and hesitatingly.

"And—and, Colonel Wickham——"

"Yes, Edie."

"You won't think for a moment, will you, that I've been making love to you this morning—you'll promise me that?"

Colonel Wickham's words came hotly enough now.

"Do you suppose for an instant, child, I should call this—this love-making!" he cried vehemently. "I should as soon dream of scenting those roses on your wall-paper and calling it a flower-garden!"

Surely, never since the days of Tantalus had thirsty soul such a full and impossible cup held so near to his dry lips.

CHAPTER XLII.

THERE are soldiers and soldiers. Soldiers who content themselves with remaining in the place assigned them and doing a fair amount of execution among the enemy; there are others who must be for ever rushing to the front and getting as many scars as possible. Edie's temperament was of the latter order. In spite of head-aching, heart-aching, sickness of mind, lassitude of body, she herself informed her father of two important events—viz, her own engagement to Colonel Wickham, and Phil's engagement to Ellinor Yorke. And that in a perfectly natural tone of voice, without a quiver of lip or of eyelid.

"Now, don't storm, dear," she said, when she had communicated the first startling piece of intelligence; "you know I was always fond of old, old gentlemen—right down old, without any nonsense about them—like you, and Colonel Wickham, and dear Mr. Rumsey. I always had a great contempt for boys—and you know

they are all boys under thirty. I've heard you say so a hundred times over."

And when she had communicated the second astounding piece of news, she ran ahead in grand, inconsequential fashion, somewhat as follows:

"Now, papa, I'm sure you're delighted at Ellinor's good fortune—no, Phil's good fortune, I suppose I ought to say. And I'm sure you ought to be infinitely—yes, infinitely obliged to Phil for preventing you from making yourself ridiculous over Ellinor, for I tremble to think what might have been the consequence if you had gone up to London, and if you had met Ellinor, as I dare say you would. You know how you made everyone talk about you last year when she stayed in the house."

When the Squire had got over his first astonishment he was heard to mutter something to the effect that "If he had made himself ridiculous, he had a daughter to keep him in countenance, at any rate!"

"Now that's sheer nonsense, papa," said Edie, her weak voice and white face oddly at variance with her peremptoriness of word and manner. "I wish you could be made to understand the difference there is in every way between my getting engaged to an old, old man, and you marrying a young girl! But there, of course, if you won't see things in a right light, I can't make you! Oh, dear, I'm so tired!" and then she leaned back again on her pillows and closed her eyes as though in sleep.

It, however, took the Squire a good long time before he could, as Edie had phrased it, see things in a right light—i.e., of course in the light in which his little daughter chose to see them. For days he went about the house telling everybody that the world was upside down, topsy-turviness the order of the day, that soon he supposed the birds would take to shooting the men, the foxes to hunt the hounds, and then he supposed he would begin to understand things.

He addressed Colonel Wickham on the matter. At first incredulously:

"Can't believe it, Wickham. You my son-in-law! Am I going mad or are you, or is Edie? Or are we all three of us on our way to a lunatic asylum? It seems to me that Edie means to give none of us any rest till we're landed safe in Bedlam." Then testily: "Why you couldn't let my little girl alone, Wickham, and go in for a widow—well, say fifteen years nearer your own age, I can't imagine! You know I demurred to Phil's hot-headed haste to get

married. Well, I tell you candidly I sha'n't hand Edie over to you in a hurry. Ten years' time will be quite soon enough for her to think of marrying, though"—this added with a spice of malice—"a little late in the day I take it for you." Then resignedly: "Well, it's a confoundedly queer business from beginning to end, but suppose I shall do no good by making a fuss over it. What is to be will be. Come and have a smoke, Wickham, and I'll explain to you my new plan for stable ventilation. Those wretched things I invested in last year have turned out an utter failure."

It may be remarked in passing that while the Squire's "testy" mood lasted, he discharged his magisterial duties with a rigour new to him. Poachers had a sorry time of it, and a good many juvenile offenders were whipped instead of being let off with a reprimand as heretofore.

But to all these moods Colonel Wickham's answers were slow and short. He differed as little as possible from his old friend; he said as little as possible. Truth to tell, he had so much to say to himself, he had but few words or ideas to bestow on the outside world. His moods, like the Squire's, would vary. Sometimes he would say to himself, "You are but keeping the door open for Phil, so that if his new love discards him, he may wander back to his old love once more." At others, he would sit dreaming over his study-fire, conjuring up fancies less of what was than of what might be in the years to come. True, he could not shut his eyes to the notion that Edie had no love (of the right sort) to give him. He had no doubt in his own mind that the explanation of the little maiden's erratic conduct lay in the fact that Ellinor had won Phil's heart away from her. She had discovered it, and out of pride had dismissed Phil. But, nevertheless, in spite of all this, it might be that time would by-and-by heal her heart-soreness, and she would find that there were still things in life left her worth having and enjoying; that though, as it were, the warm, golden sunlight had been altogether withdrawn from her, the fire which he, Colonel Wickham, might be able to kindle could be yet something of a substitute.

In the reality of Phil's devotion to

Ellinor he could scarcely bring himself to believe.

"She has befooled him, and if she really intends it, will, of course, marry him, but it is a surprisingly unambitious marriage for one of her temperament to make," he decided. Then there arose a sudden strong wish in his mind to see Phil and have one more talk with him before circumstances should render all such talks futile. "If I could see them together, those two, I should know in a moment how far things have gone, and whether there is a chance of bringing him back to his senses," he reasoned.

Edie, sending for him to convey the news that she had suddenly made up her mind that a trip to the seaside—"a nice, warm, sheltered place like Bournemouth would do wonders for her, and soon set her up again," was a little surprised by the intimation that he, too, had a trip in contemplation—a week or so in London; there were one or two things requiring his presence.

It was never any use with Edie to wrap up intentions in pretext or phrases, however plausible they might be.

She knew, all in a moment, exactly why Colonel Wickham was going to London, and what he meant to do when he got there.

"You'll see Phil, of course," she said, trying hard to make her voice as dry and as tuneless as that of the log that was crackling on the hearth, "and you'll tell him that I congratulate him with all my heart and wish him every happiness."

"I will, Edie."

"And I suppose," this added a little slowly, a little drearily, "I ought to send a message of congratulation to Ellinor too, but I can't—no, not yet. I can't wish her long life and happiness yet—I may forgive her some day, but not now."

Which last phrase, added softly—so little above her breath, indeed, that the Colonel only just heard it—confirmed him in his theory as to the true cause of little Edie's broken engagement.

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